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## IS THE GOSPEL FACT OR FABLE.

*"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come."*—I. THESS. i: 9, 10.

IN the last Tract we ascertained that the Gospels and Epistles were not forgeries of some nameless monks of the third century—that the shopkeepers, silversmiths, tent-makers, coppersmiths, tanners, physicians, senators, town councillors, officers of customs, city treasurers, and nobles of Cæsar's household, in Rome, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Athens, and Alexandria, could no more be imposed upon in the matter of documents, attested by the well known signatures of their beloved ministers, than you could by letters or sermons purporting to come from your own pastor—and that the documents which they believed to contain the directory of their lives, and the charter of that salvation which they valued more than their lives—which they read in their churches, recited at their tables, quoted in their writings, appealed to in their controversies, translated into many languages, and dispersed into every part of the known world, they neither would nor could corrupt or falsify.

The genuineness of the copies of the New Testament which we now possess, is abundantly proved by the comparison of over two thousand manuscripts, from all parts of the world; scrutinized during a period of nearly a hundred years, by the most critical scholars, so accurately that the variations of such things as would in English correspond to the crossing of a t, or the dotting of an i, have been carefully enumerated; yet the result of the whole of this searching scrutiny has been merely the suggestion of thirteen, or, as later critics say, nine unimportant alterations in the received text, of the seven thousand nine hundred and fifty-nine verses of the New Testament. This is a fact utterly unexampled in the history of manuscripts. There are but six manuscripts of the Comedies of Terence, and these have not been copied once for every thousand times the New Testament has been transcribed, yet there are thirty thousand variations found in these six manuscripts, or an average of five thousand for each, and many of them

seriously affect the sense. The average number of variations in the manuscripts of the New Testament, examined, is not quite thirty for each, including all the trivialities already noticed.

We are, then, by the special providence of God, now as undoubtedly in possession of genuine copies of the Gospels and Epistles, written by the companions of Jesus, as we are of genuine copies of the Constitution of the United States, and of the Declaration of Independence. These are historic documents, of well established genuineness and antiquity, which we now proceed to examine as to their truthfulness.

There is no history so trustworthy as that prepared by contemporary writers, especially by those who have themselves been actively engaged in the events which they relate. Such history never loses its interest, nor does the lapse of ages, in the least degree, impair its credibility. While the documents can be preserved, Xenophon's Retreat of the Ten Thousand, Cæsar's Gallic War, and the Despatches of the Duke of Wellington, will be as trustworthy as on the day they were written. Yet some suspicion may arise in our minds, that these commanders and historians might keep back some important events which would have dimmed their reputation with posterity, or have colored those they have related so as to add to their fame. Of the great facts related in memoirs addressed to their companions in arms, able at a glance to detect a falsehood, we never entertain the least suspicion.

There is, however, another kind of contemporary history not so connected and regular as the formal diary or journal, which does not even propose to relate history at all, but is for that very reason entirely removed from the suspicion of giving a coloring to it; which, at the cost of a little patience and industry, gives us the most convincing confirmations of the truth, or exposures of the mistakes of historians, by the undesigned and incidental way in which the use of a name, a date, a proverb, a jest, an expletive, a quotation, an allusion, flashes conviction upon the reader's mind. I mean contemporary correspondence. If we have the private letters of celebrated men laid before us, we are enabled to look right into them, and see their true characters. Thus Macaulay exhibits to the world the proud, lying, stupid tyrant James, displayed in his own letters. Thus Voltaire records himself an adulterer, and begs his friend, D'Alembert, to lie for him; his friend replies that he has done so. Thus the correspondence of the great American

herald of the Age of Reason exhibits him drinking a quart of brandy daily at his friend's expense, and refusing to pay his bill for boarding. In the unguarded freedom of confidential correspondence, the veil is taken from the heart. We see men as they are. The true man stands out in his native dignity, and the gilding is rubbed off the hypocrite. Give the world their letters, and let the grave silence the plaudits and the clamors which deafened the generation among whom they lived, and no man will hesitate whether or not to pronounce Hume a sensualist, or Washington the noblest work of God—an honest man.

If we add another test of truthfulness, by increasing the number of the witnesses, comparing a number of letters referring to the same events, written by persons of various degrees of education, and of different occupations and ranks of life, resident in different countries, acting independently of each other, and find them all agree in their allusions to, or direct mention of, some central facts concerning which they are all interested, no one can rightfully doubt that this undesigned agreement declares the truth. But if, in addition to all these undesigned coincidences, we happen upon the correspondence of persons whose interests and passions were diametrically opposed to those of our correspondents, and find that, when they have occasion to refer to them, they also confirm the great facts already ascertained, then our belief becomes conviction which cannot be overturned by any sophistry, that these things did occur. If Whig and Tory agree in relating the facts of James's flight and William's accession, if the letters of his Jacobite friends and those of the French ambassador confirm the statements of the English Historian, and if we are put in possession of the letters which James himself wrote from France and Ireland to his friends in England, does any man in his common sense doubt that the Revolution of 1688 did actually occur?

When in addition to all this concentration and convergence of documentary testimony, one finds that the matters related, being of public concern, and the changes effected for the public weal, the people of Great Britain have ever since observed, and do to this day celebrate, by religious worship and public rejoicings, the anniversaries of the principal events of that Revolution, and that he himself has been present, and has heard the thanksgivings, and witnessed the rejoicings on those anniversaries, the facts of the history come out from the domains of learned

curiosity, and take their stand on the market place of the busy world's engagements. We become at once conscious that this is a practical question—a great fact which concerns us—that the whole of the law and government of a vast empire has felt its impress—that our ancestors and ourselves have been moulded under its influence, and that the Protestant religion of Europe and America, under whose guardianship we have grown to a prominent place among the people of earth, and may arrive at a better prominence among the nations of the saved, has been preserved, under God, by that Revolution. We could scarcely know whether most to pity or condemn the man who should labor to persuade us that such a Revolution had never occurred, or that the facts had been essentially misrepresented.

Now it is precisely on the same kind of evidence as that which we have for these indisputable facts of the English Revolution, that we believe the great facts of the Christian Revolution. We have contemporary histories, formal and informal; letters, public and private, from the principal agents in it, and opposers of it, dispersed from Babylon to Rome, and addressed to Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Asiatics; written by physicians, fishermen, proconsuls, emperors, and apostles. And these great facts stand out more prominently on the theater of the world's business as effecting changes on our laws and lives, and their introduction as authenticated by public commemorations, more solemn and more numerous than those resulting from the English or the American Revolution. Our main difficulty lies in selecting, from the vast mass of materials, a portion sufficiently distinct and manageable to be handled in a tract of this size.

We shall be guided by the motto already announced as the rule of inductive research. One thing at a time; and the nearest first. The Epistles being nearer our own times than the Gospels, claim our first notice, and first among these, those which stand latest on the page of sacred history, the ten letters of John; two from Peter to the Christians of Asia; and those which Paul, in chains for the gospel, dictated from imperial Rome.

From the abundant notices of the early Christians by historians and philosophers, satirists and comedians, martyrs and magistrates, Jewish, Christian, and heathen, I shall select only two for comparison with the Epistles of the Apostles; and both those heathen—the celebrated letter of Pliny to Trajan, and the well

established history of Tacitus—and both utterly undeniable, and admitted by the most sceptical to be beyond suspicion. Not that I suppose that the testimony of men who did not take the trouble of making any inquiry into the reality of the facts of the Christian religion, is more accurate than that of those whose lives were devoted to its study; or that we have any just reason to attach as much weight to the assertions of persons, who, by their own showing, tortured and murdered men and women convicted of no crime but that of bearing the name of Christ, as to those of these martyrs, whose characters they acknowledged to be blameless, and who sealed their testimony with the last and highest attestation of sincerity—their blood. Considered merely as a historian, whether, as regards means of knowledge, or tests of truthfulness, by every unprejudiced mind, Peter will always be preferred to Pliny. But because the world will ever love its own, and hate the disciples of the Lord, there will always be a large class to whom the History of Tacitus will seem more veritable than that of Luke, and the Letters of Pliny more reliable than those of Peter. For their sakes we avail ourselves of that most convincing of all attestations—the testimony of an enemy. What friends and foes unite in attesting must be accepted as true.

The facts which we shall thus establish are not, in the first instance, those called miraculous. We are now ascertaining the general character, for truthfulness, of our letter writers and historians. If we find that their general historic narrative is contradicted by that of other credible historians, then we suspect their story. But if we find that, in all essential matters of public notoriety, they are supported by the concurrent testimony of their foes, and that the narrative of the miracles they relate, bears the seals of thousands who from foes became friends, from conviction of its truth, then we receive their witness as true. Even in Paul's day, heathen Greek writers bore testimony to the Apostles, what manner of entering in they had unto the converts of Thessalonica; and how they turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from Heaven, whom he raised from the dead—even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come. Pliny wrote forty years later.

Pliny, the younger, was born A. D. 61—was Prætor under Domitian—consul in the third year of Trajan, A. D. 100—was ex-

ceedingly desirous to add to his other honors that of the priesthood; was accordingly consecrated an augur, and built temples, bought images, and consecrated them on his estates; was, in A. D. 106, appointed Governor of the Roman Provinces of Pontus and Bithynia\*—a vast tract of Asia Minor, lying along the shores of the Black Sea and the Propontis; and including the Province anciently called Mysia, in which were situated Pergamos and Thyatira, and in the immediate vicinity of Sardis and Philadelphia. Pliny reached his Province by the usual route, the port of Ephesus; where John had lived for many years, and indited his letters A. D., 96. The letters of Peter to the strangers scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, bring us to the same mountainous region, eight hundred miles distant from Judea; whence, in earlier days, our savage ancestors received those Phœnician priests of Baal, whose round towers mark the coasts of Ireland nearest to the setting sun; and whence, about the period under consideration, came the heralds of the Sun of Righteousness, who brought the "*Leabhar Eoin*"† which tells their children of him in whom is the life and the light of men. Natives of these countries had been in Jerusalem during the crucifixion of Jesus, and, though only strangers, had witnessed the darkness, and the earthquake, and the rumors of what had come to pass in those days; and on the day of Pentecost had mingled with the curious crowd around the Apostles, and heard them speak, in their own mother tongues, of the wonderful works of God. The remainder of the story of their conversion we gather from the letters of Peter, John, and Pliny.

"Pliny, to the Emperor Trajan, wisheth health and happiness:‡

"It is my constant custom, Sire, to refer myself to you in all matters concerning which I have any doubt. For who can better direct me when I hesitate, or instruct me when I am ignorant?

"I have never been present at any trials of Christians, so that I know not well what is the subject matter of punishment, or of inquiry, or what strictures ought to be used in either. Nor have I been a little perplexed to determine whether any difference ought to be made upon account of age, or whether the young and tender, and the full grown and robust, ought to be treated all alike; whether repentance should entitle to pardon, or whether all who have once been

\* Lardner, vii. p. 18, *et seq.*

† Pronounced Laar Owen—John's Book.

‡ Lib. x. Ep. 97, Lardner, vii. 22.

Christians ought to be punished, though they are now no longer so, whether the name itself, although no crimes be detected, or crimes only belonging to the name ought to be punished.

"In the mean time, I have taken this course with all who have been brought before me, and have been accused as Christians. I have put the question to them, whether they were Christians. Upon their confessing to me that they were, I repeated the question a second and a third time, threatening also to punish them with death. Such as still persisted, I ordered away to be punished; for it was no doubt with me, whatever might be the nature of their opinion, that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished. There were others of the same infatuation, whom, because they are Roman citizens, I have noted down to be sent to the city.

"In a short time the crime spreading itself, even whilst under persecution, as is usual in such cases, divers sorts of people came in my way. An information was presented to me, without mentioning the author, containing the names of many persons, who, upon examination, denied that they were Christians, or had even been so; who repeated after me an invocation of the gods, and with wine and frankincense made supplication to your image, which, for that purpose, I have caused to be brought and set before them, together with the statues of the deities. Moreover, they reviled the name of Christ. None of which things, as is said, they who are really Christians can by any means be compelled to do. These, therefore, I thought proper to discharge.

"Others were named by an informer, who at first confessed themselves Christians, and afterwards denied it. The rest said they had been Christians, but had left them; some three years ago, some longer, and one or more above twenty years. They all worshiped your image, and the statues of the gods; these also reviled Christ. They affirmed that the whole of their fault or error lay in this: that they were wont to meet together, on a stated day, before it was light, and sing among themselves alternately, a hymn to Christ as a God; and bind themselves by a sacrament, not to the commission of any wickedness, but not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it. When these things were performed, it was their custom to separate, and then to come together again to a meal, which they ate in common, without any disorder; but this they had forborne since the publication of my edict, by which, according to your command, I prohibited assemblies. After receiving this account, I judged it the more necessary to examine two maid servants which were called ministers, by torture. But I have discovered nothing besides a bad and excessive superstition.

"Suspending, therefore, all judicial proceedings, I have recourse to you for advice; for it has appeared to me a matter highly deserving consideration, especially upon account of the great number of persons who are in danger of suffering. For many of all ages, and every rank, of both sexes likewise, are accused, and will be accused. Nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the lesser towns also, and the open country. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it may be restrained and arrested. It is certain that the temples,

which were almost forsaken, begin to be frequented. And the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived. Victims, likewise, are every where bought up, whereas, for some time, there were few purchasers. Whence, it is easy to imagine, what numbers of men might be reclaimed, if pardon were granted to those who shall repent?"

"Trajan to Pliny, wisheth health and happiness :\*

"You have taken the right course, my Pliny, in your proceedings with those who have been brought before you as Christians ; for it is impossible to establish any one rule that shall hold universally. They are not to be sought after. If any are brought before you, and are convicted, they ought to be punished. However, he that denies his being a Christian, and makes it evident in fact, that is, by supplicating to our gods, though he be suspected to have been so formerly, let him be pardoned upon repentance. But in no case, of any crime whatever, may a bill of information be received without being signed by him who presents it, for that would be a dangerous precedent, and unworthy of my government."

I must request my reader now to procure a New Testament, and read, at one reading, the First General Epistle of Peter, the First General Epistle of John, and his Seven Epistles to the Churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea—only about as much matter as four pages of Harper's Magazine, or half a page of the Commercial—that he may be able to do the same justice to the Apostles as to the Governor. He will thus be able to see the force of the various allusions to the numbers, doctrines, morals, persecutions, and perseverance of the Christians, contained in those letters ; the object which I have in view being to establish their authenticity by proving the truthfulness of their allusions to these things. If you think this too much trouble, please lay down the tract, and dismiss the consideration of religion from your thoughts. If the letters of the Apostles are not worth a careful reading, it is of no consequence whether they are true or false.

1. These letters take for granted, that the fact of the existence of large numbers of Christians, organized into churches, and meeting regularly for religious worship, at the close of the first century, is a matter of public notoriety to the world. Here, in countries eight hundred miles distant from its birth-place, in the lifetime of those who had seen its founder crucified, we find Christians scattered over Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithyn'a—

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\* Lib. x. Ep. 98, Lardner, vii. 24.



churches in seven provincial cities—the sect well known to Pliny, before he left Italy, as a proscribed and persecuted religion, the professors of which were customarily brought before courts for trial and punishment—though he had not himself been present at such trials—and now so numerous in his provinces, that a great number of persons, of both sexes, young and old, of all ranks, natives and Roman citizens, professed Christianity. Others, influenced by their example and instruction, renounced idolatry; victims were not led to sacrifice; the sacred rites of the gods were suspended, and their temples forsaken. The existence, then, of churches of Christ, consisting of vast numbers of converted heathens, at the close of the first century, is in no wise mythological or dubious. It is an established historical fact. The Epistles of the Apostles stand confirmed by the Epistles of the Governor and the Emperor.

2. The second great fact presented in the Epistles, and confirmed by the letters of the Governor and the Emperor, is, that the worship of the Christian church then, was essentially the same which it is now. We find these Christians of the first century commemorating the death and resurrection of Christ, and rendering divine honors to him, the “stated day” on which they assembled for worship, and “common meal,” are as plain a description of the “disciples coming together upon the first day of the week, to break bread,” as a heathen could give in few words. Their terms of communion too, to which they pledged their members by a sacrament, “not to be guilty of theft, robbery, or adultery; never to falsify their word, or deny a pledge committed to them,” find their counterpart in every well regulated church at this day.

The articles of the Christian faith, then, are not the “gradual accretions of centuries,” nor is the “redemptive idea, as attaching to Christ, a dogma of the post-Augustine period.” The churches of the first century commemorated the death and resurrection of Jesus, as that of a divine person, “singing the hymn to him as a God,” which their descendants sing at this day around his table:

“Forever and forever is, O God, thy throne of might,  
The scepter of thy Kingdom is a scepter that is right,  
Thou lovest right, and hatest ill; for God, thy God, Most High,  
Above thy fellows hath with th’ oil of joy anointed thee.”

And the question will force itself upon our minds, and cannot be evaded, how did these apostles persuade such multitudes of

heathens to believe their repeated assertions of the death, resurrection, and glory of Jesus. In the space of three octavo pages, Peter refers to these facts eighteen times. John, in like manner, repeatedly affirms them. The Christian religion consists in the belief of these facts, and a life corresponding to them. Now, how did the apostles persuade such multitudes of heathens to believe a report so wonderful, profess a religion so novel, renounce the gods they had worshiped from their childhood, and all the ceremonies of an attractive, sensual religion; "temples of splendid architecture, statues of exquisite sculpture, priests and victims superbly adorned, attendant beauteous youth of both sexes, performing all the sacred rites with gracefulness; religious dances, illuminations, concerts of the sweetest music, perfumes of the rarest fragrance," and other more licentious enjoyments, inseparable from heathen worship. How did they persuade them to exchange all this for the assembly before daybreak, the frugal common meal, the psalm to Christ, and the commemoration of the death of a crucified malefactor? If we add, that they commemorated his resurrection, by observing the Lord's day, the question still comes up, How did they come to believe that he was risen from the dead? Could a few despised strangers, or a few citizens if you will, persuade such a community, purely by natural means, to believe such a report, to care whether the Syrian Jew died or rose, or to commemorate weekly, by a solemn religious service, either his death or resurrection? It is evident they believed what they commemorated. How did they come to do so?

But whether we can answer the question or not, the fact stands out as indisputable, that not merely the writers of the Epistles and Gospels, and a few enthusiasts, but an immense multitude of all ages, of both sexes, and of every rank—the whole membership of the primitive churches—did believe in the death, resurrection, and glory of the Lord Jesus, and did render to him divine worship. This second great fact affirmed in the Epistles, stands confirmed by the testimony of the heathen Governor, and of the Roman Emperor.

3. A mere theory of a new religion, unconnected with practice, may be easily received by those who care little about any, so long as it brings no suffering or inconvenience. But the religion of these Christians was, as you see, a practical religion. If their new worship required a great departure from the worship of their

childhood, their Christian morals required a still greater departure from their former mode of life. I need not remind you of the moral codes of Socrates, Plato, and Aristides, who taught that lying, thieving, adultery, and murder were lawful;\* nor how much worse than the theory of the best of the heathen, were the lives of the worst; nor how unpopular to persons so educated would be such teaching as this—"Forasmuch, then, as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin: that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries; wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot; speaking evil of you, who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the living and the dead." "Lay aside all malice, and guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings." "Whosoever abideth in Christ sinneth not. Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil." So sharp, and stern, and strictly virtuous, is apostolic religion, as displayed in these letters. Is it possible then that these converted heathens did really even approach this standard of morality? Did this gospel of Christ actually produce any such reformation of their lives?

You have the testimony of apostates, eager to save their lives by giving such information as they knew would be acceptable to the persecutor; you have the testimony of the two aged deaconesses, under torture; you have the unwilling, but yet express, testimony of their torturer and murderer, that all his cruel ingenuity could discover nothing worse than an excessive superstition and culpable obstinacy. What, then, does this philosophic inspector of entrails, and adorer of idols, call an excessive superstition and culpable obstinacy? Why, they bound themselves by the most solemn religious services, not to be guilty of theft, robbery, or adultery; not to falsify their word, nor deny a pledge committed to them; and when some senseless blocks of brass were

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\* See Tract No. 25.

carried on men's shoulders, into the court-house, to represent a mortal man, they would not adore them, nor pray to them—no, not though this philosopher compiled the liturgy, and set the example. For this refusal, and this alone, he ordered them away to death. Doubtless they heard, in their hearts, the well-known words, "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busy body in other men's matters. But if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf."

The morality of the Epistles, then, was not merely a fine theory, but an actual rule of life. The moral codes of the apostles were received as actually binding on the members of the churches of the first century. In this all-important matter of the rule of a good life—the fruits by which the tree is known—the integrity, authority, and success of the Apostles, in turning licentious heathens into moral Christians, is authenticated by the unwilling testimony of their persecutors. The Epistles of the Apostles stand confirmed as to their ethics, by the letters of Trajan and Pliny.

4. The only other fact to which I call your attention, from among the multitude alluded to in these letters, is the cost at which these converts from heathenism embraced this new religion. Every one who renounced heathenism, and professed the name of Christ, knew very well that he must suffer for it. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy;" this was the welcome of the Bithynian convert into the Church of Christ. Persecution by fire and sword was then the common lot of the church. "I have never been present at any trials of the Christians," says the Governor. Such trials were well known to him it seems. He was not sure whether he should murder all who ever had borne the name of Christ, or only those who proved themselves to be really his disciples, by refusing to revile him, and return to idolatry; and the merciful Emperor commands him to spare the apostates. Above twenty years before—in A. D. 86—there were apostates from the persecuted religion. In A. D. 90, John had written, "they went out from us, that it might be made manifest they were not of us; for if they had been of us,

they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out that it might be made manifest that they were not all of us." So it seems Pliny thought: "They all worshipped your image, and other statues of the gods; these also reviled Christ. None of which things, as is said, they who are really Christians can by any means be compelled to do." What these means were he tells us: "I put the question to them, whether they were Christians. Upon their confessing to me that they were, I repeated the question a second and a third time, threatening, also, to punish them with death. Such as still persisted, I ordered away to be punished." What is very remarkable, it was, it seems, "usual in such cases, for the crime to spread itself, even whilst under persecution." In the face of such dangers, these heathens would still profess faith in Christ, and when they might have saved their lives by reviling him, refused to do so. From the published rescript of the Emperor, approving of Pliny's course, and condemning to death all who were convicted of being really Christians—from the public circulars of the Apostles, warning them of "fiery trials," "Satan casting some of them into prison," and exhorting them to "be faithful unto death;" and from such comments on these as the torture and public execution of aged women as well as men,—the terms of discipleship were well known to the whole world. Yet we see that in the face of all this, "great numbers of persons, of both sexes, and of all ages, and of every rank," in Pliny's opinion, were so steadfast in their faith, that "they were in great danger of suffering."

Here then is another well attested fact, in which the testimony of the apostles stands confirmed by the signatures of the Bithynian Governor, and the Roman Emperor—a fact which stands forth clear, prominent, most undoubted, without the smallest trace of any thing mythological or misty about it—that, in A. D. 106, great numbers of converted heathens did suffer exile, torture, and death itself, rather than renounce Christ; and that it was well known that the Christian faith enabled its possessor to overcome the world.

These four great facts of the later Epistles, being thus established beyond dispute, in pursuance of our plan, we ascend the stream of history some forty years, to the time of the earlier Epistles, when Paul lay in the Mamertine dungeons, and his faithful companion, Luke, wrote the continuation of his narrative of

the things most surely believed among the Christians; when "Apostles were made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things;" and Christians "were made a gazing stock, both by reproaches and afflictions;" "were brought before kings and rulers, and hated of all nations for Christ's name sake;" "endured a great fight of afflictions;" were "for his sake killed all the day long, and annointed as sheep for the slaughter;" were made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men." We remove the field of our investigation from a remote Province of Asia, to one equally remote from Judea, and far more unfavorable for the growth of the religion of a crucified Jew—the proud capital of the world—imperial Rome. The time shall be shortly after the burning of the city, in A. D. 64, and during the raging of the first of those systematic, imperial, and savage persecutions through which the Church of Christ waded, in the bloody footsteps of her Lord, to world-wide influence, and undying fame. Our historian shall be the well known Tacitus; and the single extract from his history, one of which the infidel Gibbon says:\*

"The most sceptical criticism is obliged to respect the truth of this important fact, and the integrity of this celebrated passage of Tacitus." I shall not insert quotations from Paul or Luke; that were merely to transcribe large portions of the Epistles and Gospels, which whoever will not carefully peruse, disqualifies himself for forming a judgment of their veracity. The confirmation of the four facts already established, of the existence, worship, morals, and sufferings of the Disciples of Christ; and these facts as well known within thirty years after his death, will sufficiently appear by the perusal of the following testimony of Tacitus.†

After relating the burning of the city, and Nero's attempt to transfer the odium of it to the sect "commonly known by the name of Christians, he says:"

"The author of that name was Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal, under the procurator, Pontius Pilate. But this pestilent superstition, checked for awhile, broke out afresh, and spread not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but also in Rome, where all that is evil on the earth finds its way, and is practised. At first, those only were apprehended who confessed themselves of that sect; afterward, a vast multitude discovered by them; all of whom were condemned, not so much for the crime of burning the city, as for their enmity to mankind. Their executions

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\*Decline and Fall, vol. 2, p. 407.

†Lib. xv. chap. 44.

were so contrived, as to expose them to derision and contempt. Some were covered over with the skins of wild beasts, that they might be torn to pieces by dogs; some were crucified; while others, having been daubed over with combustible materials, were set up for lights in the night time, and thus burned to death. For these spectacles Nero gave his own gardens, and, at the same time, exhibited there the diversions of the circus; sometimes standing in the crowd as a spectator, in the habit of a charioteer; and, at other times, driving a chariot himself; until at length these men, though really criminal, and deserving of exemplary punishment, began to be commiserated, as people who were destroyed, not out of regard to the public welfare, but only to gratify the cruelty of one man."

We add no comment on this remarkable passage. Take up your New Testament and read the contemporary history—Acts 22 to the end of the book—and the letters of Paul from Rome, to Philemon, Titus, the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and the second to Timothy, written when the aged prisoner was ready to be offered, and the time of his departure, amidst such scenes and sufferings, was at hand. Then form your own opinion as to the origin and nature of that faith in Jesus which enabled him to say: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, that I may finish my course with joy, and the testimony which I have received of the Lord Jesus." "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."

Whatever may be your opinion of the Apostles' hope for the future, you must acknowledge that we have ascertained, beyond contradiction, these four facts of the past:

1. That without the power of force, or the help of governments, and in spite of them, they did convert vast multitudes of idolaters from a senseless worship of stocks and stones, to the worship of the one living and true God—a thing never done by the preachers of any other religion before or since.

2. That without the help of power or civil law, and solely by moral and spiritual means, they did persuade multitudes of licentious heathens to give up their vices, and obey the pure precepts of the morality contained in their Epistles—a thing never done by the preachers of any other religion before or since.

3. That these converts were so firmly persuaded of the truth of their new religion, that, with the choice of life and worldly honor, or a death of infamy and torture before them, multitudes deliberately chose to suffer torture and death rather than renounce the belief in one God, obedience to his laws, and the hope of eternal life

through Jesus Christ, which they had learned from the sermons and letters of these Apostles—a thing never done by the professors of any other religion before or since.\*

4. The faith which produced such an illumination of their minds; which caused such a blessed change in their lives; which filled them with joy and hope, and enabled them even to despise torture and death, was briefly this: "That Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again on the third day, according to the Scriptures, that he ascended up into heaven, and will come again to judge the world, and reward every man according to his works, and that whosoever believes these things in his heart, and confesses them with his mouth, shall be saved; and he that believeth them not, shall be damned."

It is a fact, then, indisputably proved by history, that the New Testament does teach a religion which can enlighten men's minds, reform their lives, give peace to their consciences, and enable them to meet death with a joyful hope of life eternal. It has done these things in times past, and is doing them now. These are its undoubted fruits. Reader, this faith may be yours. It will work the same results in you as it has done in others. Like causes ever produce like effects. Jesus waits to deliver you from your sins, to fill you with joy and peace in believing, and make you abound in hope, by the power of the Holy Ghost. He has promised, if you will ask it, "I will give them a heart to know me that I am the Lord."

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\*The sufferings of the Jews, under Antiochus, are no exception. They suffered for their faith in the true God, the Messiah to come, and a resurrection to life eternal.

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## NOTICE.

*April, 1857.*

The American Reform Tract and Book Society is progressing in efforts to spread Truth and Godliness, and promote action on all great moral questions, and more especially, the great question of Freedom and Slavery. Some thirty Tracts, and fifteen books, have been published. Arrangements are made for increasing this number just as fast as funds are provided.

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